

# WESTON

## Arguments – General Points

- Arguments are sets of reasons in support of a conclusion.
- The purpose of an argument is to support one's view, to seek the meaning or justification for a position or belief, and to rationally persuade others.

## Diagnosing an Argument

1. What is the conclusion?
  - What is the point of the argument?
  - What is the author (or you) trying to prove?
  - The first step in diagnosing an argument is to discover the conclusion, whether your own or the author's.
2. What are the reasons for the conclusion?
  - Why is torturing babies for fun wrong?
  - The second step in diagnosing an argument is to list the reasons for the conclusion.

## Presenting an Argument

1. Present your reasons in a "natural order." One idea, reason or thought should follow the other in a fashion that makes sense and flows according to the intentions of the argument.
2. Use strong premises. Weak premises will lead to a weak argument.
3. Be precise. The more direct, the better.
4. Use consistent terms and phrasings throughout the argument.
5. Maintain the same meaning for terms throughout. Define terms early and stick to those meanings.

## Types of Argument

- Arguments by Example
- Arguments by Analogy
- Arguments from Authority
- Arguments about Causes
- Deductive Arguments

## Definitions

- Use clear and specific terms
- If there are competing definitions for a term, use the clearest case
- Definitions are not arguments--don't use a definition to make an argument
- Clarify, clarify, clarify!

## What is Philosophy?

## What is Philosophy?

- Difficult question to answer because what philosophy is and what philosophers do have changed over the centuries
- In general, philosophy and philosophers examine fundamental questions about ourselves, our actions, our beliefs, our institutions, our society, etc.
- Four suggestions
  1. Philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom
  2. Philosophy is the pursuit of self-understanding
  3. Philosophy is the attempt to rationally justify one's fundamental assumptions
  4. Philosophy attempts to clarify basic concepts

## 1. Love of Philosophy

- Philosophy literally means “the love of wisdom”
- “Love” does not entail “possession” but rather “focus” or “pursuit”. So, the lover of wisdom focuses his or her life on wisdom--it is his or her passion
- What is wisdom? For Plato, it was a virtue of the rational soul. For Aristotle, it was this highest intellectual virtue...

## 2. Wisdom as Self-understanding

- Socrates said one of the greatest virtues is to “Know thyself.” He also said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”
- Being wise is the process of trying to understand oneself through the rational examination of one’s beliefs and actions.
- But wisdom is not just an introspective search for the truth, but also the pursuit of virtue--of living a morally virtuous life. So, knowing oneself also requires knowing one’s place in the human and non-human world.

*Wisdom is the ability to rationally utilize one’s knowledge and experiences to guide one’s thoughts and actions toward making oneself a virtuous, useful, and complete human being within the human and non-human community.*

## 3. Philosophy Seeks Rational Justification

- Philosophy looks at our common assumptions underlying the fundamental questions about ourselves, how we are to live in the world, and the nature of the world in which we live
- Philosophy seeks justification and reasons for these assumptions
- The attempt to justify our assumptions and beliefs is built upon the dialogue that ensues when one advances and examines arguments

## 4. Philosophy Attempts to Clarify Concepts

- When one asks questions like, “What is justice,” or “What is freedom of the will?” one must determine what one means by these concepts before one can answer these questions.
- In clarifying concepts, one must know what does or does not apply to the concept.
- Figuring out what does or does not apply to a particular concept often starts with the most obvious or self-evident observations. From assumptions that seem obvious, we attempt to argue for or against certain conceptions. Sometimes, the philosopher will reach conclusions which are not obvious, even after starting from obvious assumptions.
- The attempt is to break down hard questions and deal with them clearly and precisely

## The Value of Reading

## Why Read? What Good Is Reading?

“Reading has cognitive consequences that extend beyond its immediate task of lifting meaning from a particular passage. Furthermore, these consequences are reciprocal and exponential in nature. Accumulated over time—spiraling either upward or downward—they carry profound implications for the development of a wide range of cognitive capabilities.”

From: Cunningham & Stanovich. (1998). “What Reading Does for the Mind,”  
*American Educator*.

### 1. Employers now rank reading and writing as top deficiencies in new hires.

- 38% of employers find high school graduates “deficient” in reading comprehension, while 63% rate this basic skill “very important.”
- “Written communications” tops the list of applied skills found lacking in high school and college graduates alike.
- One in five U.S. workers read at a lower skill level than their job requires.<sup>vii</sup>
- Remedial writing courses are estimated to cost more than \$3.1 billion for large corporate employers and \$221 million for state employers.<sup>viii</sup>

Directly quoted from NEA’s “To Read or Not to Read” (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

#### Rated Very Important by Employers

Percentage of employers who rate the following basic skills as “very important” for high school graduates:

Reading comprehension	63%
English language	62%
Writing in English	59%
Mathematics	30%
Foreign languages	11%

Source: The Conference Board, *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, 2006

#### Percentage of Employers Who Rate High School Graduates as Deficient in Basic Skills

Writing in English	72%
Foreign languages	62%
Mathematics	54%
History/geography	46%
Government/economics	46%
Science	45%
Reading comprehension	38%
Humanities/arts	31%
English language	21%

Source: The Conference Board, *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, 2006

Directly quoted from NEA’s “To Read or Not to Read” (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

**Table 8D. Skill Deficiencies in College Graduates (Top Five)**

Percentage of employers who rate two-year and four-year college graduates as deficient in basic and applied skills:

Two-Year College Graduates		Four-Year College Graduates	
Basic Skills		Basic Skills	
Foreign Languages	50%	Foreign Languages	41%
Writing in English	36%	Writing in English	26%
Government/Economics	32%	Government/Economics	17%
History/Geography	26%	History/Geography	17%
Mathematics	25%	Science	13%
Applied Skills		Applied Skills	
Written Communications	47%	Written Communications	28%
Leadership	43%	Leadership	24%
Professionalism/Work Ethic	31%	Professionalism/Work Ethic	19%
Lifelong Learning/Self-Direction	28%	Creativity/Innovation	17%
Creativity/Innovation	28%	Lifelong Learning/Self-Direction	14%

Source: The Conference Board, *Are They Really Ready to Work?* (2006)

Directly quoted from NEA's "To Read or Not to Read" (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

**Percentage of Employers Who Rate Job Entrants as Deficient in Applied Skills**

High school graduates deficient in:	College graduates deficient in:		
Leadership	73%	Leadership	24%
Professionalism/work ethic	70%	Professionalism/work ethic	19%
Critical thinking/problem solving	70%	Creativity/innovation	17%
Lifelong learning/self direction	58%	Lifelong learning/self-direction	14%

Source: The Conference Board, *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, 2006

Directly quoted from NEA's "To Read or Not to Read" (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

**2. Good readers generally have more financially rewarding jobs.**

- More than 60% of employed Proficient readers have jobs in management, or in the business, financial, professional, and related sectors.
- Only 18% of Basic readers are employed in those fields.
- Proficient readers are 2.5 times as likely as Basic readers to be earning \$850 or more a week.

**Percentage Employed in Management and Professional Occupations, by Reading Level in 2003**

	Management, business and financial	Professional and related	Total in either job category
Proficient	19%	42%	61%
Basic	8%	10%	18%
Below Basic	3%	4%	7%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Directly quoted from NEA's "To Read or Not to Read" (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

**Percentage of Full-Time Workers by Weekly Earnings and Reading Level in 2003**

	\$850-\$1,149	\$1,150-\$1,449	\$1,450-\$1,949	\$1,950 or more	Total earning \$850 or more
Proficient	20%	13%	13%	12%	58%
Basic	12%	5%	2%	4%	23%
Below Basic	7%	3%	1%	2%	13%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Directly quoted from NEA's "To Read or Not to Read" (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

### 3. Less advanced readers report fewer opportunities for career growth.

- 38% of Basic readers said their reading level limited their job prospects.
- The percentage of Below-Basic readers who reported this experience was 1.8 times greater.
- Only 4% of Proficient readers reported this experience.

**Table 8F. Percentage of Adults Who Said Their Reading Skills Limited Their Job Opportunities, by Reading Level in 2003**

Prose literacy level	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
Below Basic	30%	13%	22%	35%
Basic	62%	14%	15%	9%
Intermediate	85%	7%	6%	3%
Proficient	96%	2%	1%	1%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Directly quoted from NEA's "To Read or Not to Read" (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

### 7. Deficient readers are more likely than skilled readers to be out of the workforce.

- More than half of Below-Basic readers are not in the workforce.
- 44% of Basic readers lack a full-time or part-time job—twice the percentage of Proficient readers in that category.

**Percentage of Adults Employed Full-Time or Part-Time, by 2003 Reading Level**

Proficient	78%	↓
Basic	56%	
Below Basic	45%	

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Directly quoted from NEA's "To Read or Not to Read" (2007). (<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>)

## Why Study Philosophy?

## Value of Studying Philosophy

- “The great virtue of philosophy is that it teaches not what to think, but how to think. It is the study of meaning, of the principles underlying conduct, thought and knowledge. The skills it hones are the ability to analyse, to question orthodoxies and to express things clearly. However arcane some philosophical texts may be - and not everybody can come to grips with the demands of Austrian logical positivism - the ability to formulate questions and follow arguments is the essence of education.”

*Times of London*, August 15, 1998 (in reference to philosophy in the U.S.A.)

## Value of Studying Philosophy

- *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1985

Philosophy majors scored

- 8.7% better on the LSAT
- 11% better on the GMAT
- 17% better on the verbal section of the GRE
- 4.6% better on the quantitative section of the GRE

## Value of Studying Philosophy

- *Guide to the Graduate Record Examination Program*, 1996-1997

On the GRE, Philosophy majors scored

- Higher than **every other** major in the Humanities and Arts
- Higher than **every** major in the Social Sciences, Life Sciences, Education, Business, and majors listed as Other
- Only majors to have higher mean scores than Philosophy on the combined GRE sections are (in order): Physics and Astronomy, Mathematical Sciences, Materials Engineering, and Chemical Engineering

## Value of Studying Philosophy, 2002-05

- *Guide to the Graduate Record Examination Program*, 2002-2005

On the GRE, Philosophy majors scored (mean)

- Higher than **every other** major in Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Engineering, Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, Education, Business, and Other Fields on the Verbal and Analytical Writing sections
- Only majors to have higher mean scores than Philosophy on the Quantitative section of the GRE are: Physics and Astronomy, Mathematical Sciences, CS, Chemistry, all Engineering majors, Economics, and Banking and Finance

## Fallacies

(a very short list)

## Fallacies

Two most common fallacies

1. False generalization: trying to base a generalization on too few examples, the wrong example (bad authority), or a misrepresentative sample
2. Overlooking alternatives: it's a big world out there, don't jump on the first alternative--consider other likely causes or explanations

## Ad Hominem

- attacking the person of alleged authority rather than his or her qualifications
- EX: "Anyone who thinks abortion should not be legal are a bunch of chauvanistic pigs who think women should be barefoot in the kitchen."

## Ad Ignorantiam (appeal to ignorance)

- arguing that a claim is true (false) just because it has not been shown to be false (true).
- Basic form:
  - We don't know that statement S is false, or We have no reason to think that S is false. Therefore, S is (probably) true.
  - We don't know that statement S is true, or We have no reason to think that S is true. Therefore, S is (probably) false.
- Both cases appeal to one's ignorance. Then, the argument tries to move from one's ignorance to claims about what is true or false.

## Problem with Appeals to Ignorance

1. Leads to contradiction
  - I have no reason to think there aren't 30 students in this class. And, I have no reason to think there are 30 students in this class. So, there (probably) both **are** and **are not** 30 students in this class.
2. Nothing follows from one's ignorance (except that one is ignorant). You don't get knowledge from ignorance. You just get more ignorance. If ignorance did lead to knowledge, the best way to get smart would be to stay stupid.

## Ad Misericordiam (appeal to pity)

- appealing to pity as an argument for special treatment
- EX: "I'm just such a miserable person, you ought to grant me special privileges."

## Begging the Question

- implicitly using your conclusion as a premise
- EX: God exists because it says so in the Bible, which I know is true because God wrote it, after all!

## Complex Question

- posing a question or issue in such a way that a person cannot agree or disagree with you without committing him- or herself to some other claim you wish to promote
- Ex.: "Will you follow your conscience, instead of your pocketbook, and donate to the cause?"
  - Anyone who says "no," regardless of his or her real reasons for not donating, is made to feel ignoble; anyone who says "yes," regardless of his or her real reasons for donating, is made to feel noble.

## Composition & Division

- assuming that a whole must have the properties of its parts or that the parts must have the properties of the whole
- EX: Since the members of the team are fine athletes, the team must be a fine team. Or, since the team is the best in the league, the members of the team must be the best in the league.

## Equivocation

- using a single word in more than one sense
- EX:
  1. It's abnormal to be a female boxer.
  2. It's not a good thing to be abnormal.

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  3. Therefore, it's not a good thing to be a female boxer.

## False Dilemma

- reducing the options you consider to just two, often sharply opposed and unfair to the person against whom the dilemma is posed
- “Since the universe could not have been created out of nothingness, it must have been created by an intelligent life-force ...”
- Is creation by an intelligent life-force the only other possibility?

## Straw Man

- caricaturing an opposing view so that it is easy to refute
- often involves disingenuously making someone else's argument so simple or stupid that anyone would disagree with it

## Appeal to False Authority

- Appeal to some authority or expert to support one's position when that so-called authority has no expertise in what is being claimed
  - Form of arguments from authority
    - Dr. Authority thinks or says that X is true. Therefore, X is true.
    - The assumption is that Dr. A would not say X is true unless X really were true.
  - But, what makes for a good authority?

## Authority Checklist

1. The authority really made the claim being attributed to him/her
2. The authority's claim is in an objective realm of discourse (chemistry and not astrology)
3. The authority really is an expert on that subject
4. Other authorities in the field generally agree with the expert's claims or methods
5. The authority is a reliable person when reporting on the particular subject matter

## Ad Populum

- appealing to the emotions of a crowd. Also, appealing to a person to “go along” with the crowd.
- EX: “Everyone’s doing it!”
- Ad populum is a good example of a bad argument from authority: no reasons are offered to show that “everybody” is an informed or impartial source